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WHAT TO READ IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

THE fact that Great Britain belongs to Europe, instead of standing sufficient unto herself between two continents, is showing itself in an unparalleled interest in the countries of the Continent. The generality of our people know more than they ever did before of the nations of the great mainland. The night of ignorance is slowly and surely giving way to the bright day of knowledge and understanding. Indeed, we may fairly claim that we know a good deal more of, for instance, Russia than Germany did at the beginning of the war. Britannia has ceased to be the old maid of the sea and has entered into the fuller joys of married life. Such is her joy: to find Russia coming half-way to meet her in national ethics, to be living and fighting for the same ideal, the sacredness of nationality.

Every event of the day and possibility of the future prompts us to converse with Russia and try to find out her mind on every subject that is of value to us. Hence the great demand there is just now for Russian literature. People feel that the best way they can realize the life of Russia is through reading Russian novels. This is quite a correct notion. There are many books written by Englishmen on Russia and by Russian exiles on Russia, but few of them by people who really know their subject. For every good book, such as Baring's "Mainsprings of Russia," there are two perfunctory compilations, such as Rapoport's "Home Life in Russia" or Alexinsky's "Modern Russia." The best way for Englishmen to check these im-

pressions is by first-hand acquaintance with Russia. That first-hand acquaintance may be made by travel when the war is over and in the interim by the reading of Russian literature. Those who have leisure would find the learning of Russian a pleasant hobby; there is a good grammar now out—"Bondar's Russian Method," published by Effingham Wilson at 5 s. net; it seems to be the only good available grammar now that the Motti volume cannot be imported from Germany.

Necessarily, however, there must be many who have neither the leisure nor the impulse to learn the language and read in the original. For them remain quite a full list of translated works. There is, however, a certain amount of hesitant fear and misunderstanding in the minds of many people. They feel that Russian literature contains much that is unpleasant, much that is not intended for the young girl. This idea is fostered by many writers on the free-thought and anti-religious side of our literary and journalistic life. It is a misconception. Russian literature is considerably purer than our own. The bulk of it can be given to any young man or woman whether their upbringing has been in the good, traditional, pure way or in the bad, modern, frank way. All Dostoevsky, Turgénief, Gogol, and Tchekhof may be given to any one and every one, though "The Crime and the Punishment" should never be put into the hands of highly impressionable young people. Gorky is, of course, "not for babes," and much of Tolstoy, such

as "The Resurrection," "The Kreutzer Sonata," and "Anna Karenina," is not really much suited to English life.

There is one book that is doing more now for Anglo-Russian friendship than almost any on the book-shelf; it is "The Brothers Karamazof," by Dostoevsky, well translated by Constance Garnett. Any one who has not read that volume and who takes it up is about to enter a most wonderful new world. "The Brothers Karamazof" marks an era in one's spiritual life. It is the most wonderful interpretation of the Russian point of view that we possess. After "The Brothers Karamazof" comes "Fathers and Sons," by Turgénief, a study of the revolutionary and nihilist Bazarof; then Gogol's "Dead Souls," the most amusing book in the Russian language; then Tchekhof's stories in "The Black Monk" series. But probably a classification of the translations would be very serviceable to those who want to know what next to read in Russian literature.

"The Brothers Karamazof." By Dostoevsky.

"The Crime and the Punishment." By Dostoevsky.

"The Idiot." By Dostoevsky.

"Dead Souls." By Gogol.

"The Inspector-General." By Gogol.

"Tarass Bulba." By Gogol. A great historical novel of Cossack life. Most popular in Russia. It gives a real live picture of the Cossacks.

"War and Peace." By Tolstoy.

"Fathers and Sons." By Turgénief.

"On the Eve." By Turgénief. A great love story.

"Rudin." A study of Russian character.

"Virgin Soil." A study of the revolutionary movement in Russia.

"Foma Gordyef." By Gorky. A

wonderful story of bourgeois and peasant life.

"Three Men." The best translation is published by Isbister. A story of bourgeois workmen and street women; very sordid, but undoubtedly a great book.

"Twenty-Six Men and a Girl." Two stories in this volume are very much worth reading: "Tcheklash" and "The Fellow Traveller."

"The Story of the Seven Hanged." By Leonid Andreief. A famous post-revolutionary volume over which Tolstoy shed tears.

"The Life of a Man." A remarkable mystery play.

"Judas Iscariot and Other Tales." Clever psychological studies written impressionistically.

"Russian Romance." By Pushkin. The story of the pistol-shot is well worth reading. Out of print.

These are all good books. They by no means exhaust the catalogue of the existent translations, but if read they form a splendid foundation of knowledge of Russia. The reader who has gone so far will easily find the rest. All these are full of spiritual power ready to flow into our life, for Russia expresses her very soul in her literature. These are, moreover, well-known and accepted books in Russia. The newest Russian books have yet to make their appearance here—the stories of Kouprin, the essays of Kozanof and of Merezhkovsky, the wonderful studies made by Viacheslaf Ivanof, the new tales of the war which Maxim Gorky is now writing; but these are coming. Translators are busy and publishers are ready. Readers also are ready.

When the war is over Russia will be nearer to us than she is now. We shall be able to help one another more in

peace and friendship even than in war. Already the Russians know our literature very well. We ought to know hers. For in order to settle the problems of peace we need to have in this country a popular knowledge of Russia. From knowledge comes understanding, and from understanding comes love. Love solves all problems—that, indeed, is a true Russian thought, and most Britons agree.

From The London Times.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "TIMES"]

Sir,—As one who has derived more help and inspiration from Russian literature than from any other, may I make a comment on the article, "What to Read in Russian Literature"?

The list of recommended works does not contain such masterpieces as Tolstoy's "Sevastopol," "Twenty-Three Tales," and the volume of short stories which includes "The Snowstorm." And it seems to me rather awful if the same

master-writer's very great novels "Anna Karenina" and "Resurrection," which suffer, if anything, from an excess of moral purpose, are to be deemed "not really much suited to English life." In spite of the vogue of the wonderful Dostoevsky, Tolstoy is still to most Russians, and to many of us who are trying to write, the greatest Russian writer, and to make out a list of desirable Russian literature with one book only by his hand is to present "Hamlet" with only the head of the Prince of Denmark.

The pre-eminent quality, the special characteristic, of Russian writers is spiritual truth, the depth and directness, the utter sincerity, with which they face life in all its shifts. The infection of this is the real benefit and delight that English, above all other, readers may hope to get from Russian literature, besides the satisfaction of our desirable curiosity about the national life of our new ally.

Yours truly,

JOHN GALSWORTHY.

TCHEHOV'S TALES

WHOSESOEVER it may have been, it was a happy notion to follow the first story, "The Darling," in the "Tales of Tchegov," with Tolstoy's remarks upon it. At once we get the two minds in sharp opposition, and are thus enabled to see readily something of what Tchegov was and a good deal of what he was not. "The Darling" is the tale of a dear, stupid, lovable woman. She had no direction, no personality of her own. But she had a gift of devotion, a habit, one might almost call it, of devoting her-

self to one human being at a time and drawing direction, personality, and interest by reflection out of his. She married a theatrical manager, and he and the drama were her life. When he died she married a timber merchant, and instantly timber became of absorbing interest. The timber merchant was succeeded by a veterinary surgeon. And when the veterinary surgeon died her life was a blank.

"And, what was worst of all, she had no opinions of any sort. She saw the ob-